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ABSTRACT

Agricultural extension is one component in an array including research, training, education, marketing, international trade, etc. which develop together to bring about growth, and sustained growth determines the priorities for extension. These priorities depend inevitably on the stage of development of a country or region, and on the current environment in which extension operates. Priorities for extension include: (1) establishing appropriate systems, based on sound management principles (as embodied by World Bank's Training and Visit system); (2) promoting extension as a major development resource to governments and farmers, to ensure that the necessary resources are provided to carry out its true functions; (3) combining research, extension, and training projects to overcome the problem of inefficient information dissemination systems; (4) training field workers to identify and select applicable technology for local farmers; (5) building and sustaining quality manpower (by offering education, training, and incentives at all levels); (6) educating farmers and other clients to eliminate barriers between them and the technology and research they receive; and (7) reducing the costs of extension without compromising its effectiveness (working with groups instead of individuals, careful use of mass media and computers--privatization and developments in communication technology hold promise for cutting costs and improving effectiveness). (JMM)

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PRIORITIES FOR EXTENSION 1/

By

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1. An essential feature of the development process is that no single component of that process acts in isolation. The leading edge of development is shifted by forces within a system, whether that system be a farm, a nation or a region, interacting with external pressures and weaknesses. This picture of a dynamic process, of the mutual interdependence of parts, illustrates why I had some problems when asked to speak on priorities for extension. By focusing attention just on extension one tends to isolate it from the development process, to take it out of context and indeed to distort the extension picture. Extension is one component in an array including research, training, education, marketing, international trade etc. which, developing together bring about growth. And it is sustained growth with equity which must be our highest priority. At the outset

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2/ Rainfed Crops Advisor, The World Bank, Washington, D. C. The views expressed are the author's alone and in no way should be construed as official views of the World Bank.

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therefore I must make it clear that it is the final objective of sustained growth which determines the priorities for extension. This may seem obvious but is frequently overlooked, particularly by designers of extension systems and by extension managers who tend to see extension as a closed system. Extension is a facilitator of growth and as such must be flexible enough to accommodate growth. Flexibility and adaptability of extension is a priority I shall return to later.

2. Priorities for extension depend inevitably on the stage of development of a country or region and on the current environment in which extension operates. For example, the next priority for Indian extension probably lies in manpower development and building links between extension and the agricultural universities; in Malawi, priority should go to developing appropriate technical messages, in Mexico attention is focusing on cutting extension costs, whereas in several countries priority must be given to establishing a basic framework for the extension service. Thus priorities depend on cases and identifying specific priorities for a country is an important part of the Bank's analytical work. Of undisputed importance, however, is getting the fundamentals right, getting commitment to extension at all levels, using the power of extension in knowledge generation and diffusion, and in developing and sustaining manpower. I shall briefly review these points before looking at the possibilities of reducing extension costs whilst retaining extension effectiveness. From this discussion my views on priorities for extension should become obvious.

Getting the Fundamentals Right

3. If there is one rule which the World Bank follows in supporting extension, it is that there is no extension blueprint to be applied irrespective of circumstances. Those who identify the World Bank with the Training and Visit (T & V) system may be somewhat surprised at that statement. Let me quickly set the record straight. The essence of T and V is its adherence to fundamental management principles as they would apply to any geographically scattered operations which aims to change the behaviour of many technologically isolated individuals using poorly educated staff. These fundamental principles involve identifying the customer, preparing appropriate messages, focusing exclusively on the advisory function at the field level, adopting a single line of command with structured visits and supervisory schedules, systematic training and continuous links with research. These principles apply not only to agricultural extension but also to operations such as health delivery systems, industrial extension, population control campaigns and to certain aspects of education programs.

4. T and V embodies these principles; it is not a recipe to be followed indiscriminately. Unfortunately it has become associated with precise staffing patterns, fixed extension worker to farmer ratios, visits to contact farmers every ten days etc. These are the details pertaining to particular circumstances at particular times and must not be mistaken for fundamentals of the system. T and V is a flexible system, allowing adaptation according to geographical and socioeconomic conditions, to the types of messages, to the stage of development of customers and to changing

environments. Any extension system which operates according to the above principles is a T & V system.

5. This flexibility in T and V must not, however, be used as a license to abandon the fundamentals of structured management. Experience at the Bank suggests that a first priority in developing any extension system should be to establish the rules of the game according to these basic principles; it is vital to get the fundamentals right.

6. Commitment to Extension. One of the most pervasive problems facing extension world-wide is a lack of understanding of the potential role in development of an effective extension service. Extension is viewed merely as a transmitter of technical messages from research to the farmer, and when messages run dry the very existence of an extension service is questioned. This attitude shows itself in meagre budget allocations and in the well known vicious circle of low operating costs leading to low effectiveness and even greater questioning of extension rationale.

7. An effective extension service is a major development resource. An extension worker should be seen by Government and farmer alike as the principle agent of change, a driving force in the development process. A vigorous extension system should put pressure on other institutions to

perform effectively. Of course, transmitting technology is an important function of extension but interpreting and articulating farmers' problems is equally important. Far from being redundant, when messages are weak or inappropriate, it can be argued that that is just when extension can prove its worth.

8. Extension has another vital function, to assist in identifying recommendation domains and to identify target groups in a society. We tend to blame research for producing inappropriate recommendations, for designing technology only for high access farmers and for ignoring the needs of disadvantaged groups: women, smallholders and rural landless. Yet much of the blame must fall on the shoulders of extension which mostly fails to provide appropriate terms of reference for research work.

9. The challenges facing agriculture in the developing world are formidable; rapidly increasing populations demanding more from a declining resource base, the need to balance efficient agricultural production against minimal environment disruption, persuading risk-averse farmers to adopt innovations, problems of pest and disease resistance and of a more competitive market place. These challenges must be faced individually by millions of farmers and collectively by Governments. And one of the most effective weapons which Governments can muster to face these challenges is an efficient extension service. The Israeli extension service proves this point. A priority for extension is to sell itself to Governments, to ensure that its potential value is recognized, and therefore to attract the resources necessary to carry out its true range of functions.

10. Extension's Role in Knowledge Development. The divergent history of research and extension in developing countries has resulted in what should be a continuous knowledge generation and diffusion process being parcelled into responsibility orbits. Research, extension and training institutions have developed as separate entities, often in different Ministries and organizations and frequently in widely dispersed locations. Linkages between institutions are optimistically conceived but usually ignore the fact that such linkages would cut across boundaries of administration, policy, tradition and culture. Western style linkage mechanisms (committees), established to shore up inherent weaknesses in institutional arrangements, may operate satisfactorily for a time, but particularly at grass roots level, are rarely sustainable. Such fragmented organizations are extremely inefficient as information diffusion systems. Knowledge, awareness and experience become locked within responsibility orbits and lost to the system as a whole.

11. An inherent danger in this fragmented administrative system is that administrators and donors focus on individual components, e.g., research or extension, instead of on the knowledge system as a whole. Funds are allocated to institutions, often in an ad hoc manner, instead of to priority programs within the knowledge system. This leads to situations such as in the Ivory Coast where research has been promoted far ahead of extension, or conversely in Somalia where extension has become the dominant service. The World Bank has attempted to solve the problem by supporting combined research and extension projects or by combining missions to research, extension and training projects, but this only partly overcomes the difficulty.

12. A priority for sustained institution development should be for the focus of investment plans to be placed on linkages. Extension has an important role to play in this process, particularly in farming systems research and on-farm testing, and in bringing the farmer more to the forefront in dialogue with research.

13. The feedback function of extension to research is often extremely weak. This situation stems largely from researchers' lack of respect for traditional farming practices and for the extension service in general. The concept of information passing down from the knowledgeable to the grateful is being increasingly challenged. However, a balance must be maintained between recognizing the needs and constraints of farmers, and recognizing the potential of technical innovation under farm conditions. Extension has a critical analytical and translation role to play in this process.

14. I wish to make one final point on the role of extension worker. Although there is growing respect for farmers' knowledge we rarely exploit the knowledge and 'feel' for social norms and behaviour embodied in extension workers. There is a tendency to view field extension workers as mere messengers, ignoring the fact that most were raised in villages and spent their early years on local farms. This innate knowledge of traditions should be exploited by involving field level workers in the identification of farmers' constraints in identifying strata of society into which technology can be injected, and in identifying cultural

practices which could be applied elsewhere. The most frequently ignored knowledge source is the local farming community; yields are highly valuable yet the source of variation is often overlooked. The skill lies in being able to identify and select applicable technology from farmers' fields. Training extension workers in this skill could have an extremely high pay off and should be a high priority in future extension strategies.

Developing and Sustaining Extension Manpower

15. The scarcest extension resource is quality manpower; more extension projects fail for lack of skilled manpower than for any other reason and the potential role I have outlined above for extension is founded upon high calibre, commited extension workers. Two factors are involved in building and sustaining manpower: education and training at all levels, and incentives. The quality of manpower entering extension services can only be up-graded by improving education levels, particularly through improving secondary school and university curricula and standards. In-service training programs should be re-planned and program content should be based on a professional needs assessment. As an example of this approach I would cite the newly developed training program for extension staff in Zimbabwe. The program, designed by local consultants, consists of a series of co-ordinated courses to be taken by staff at all levels over a period of about three years. Successful completion of the courses has been determined by Government to be a pre-requisite for promotion. That factor alone ensures that the courses are taken seriously.

16. Incentives are, of course, critical elements in sustaining quality manpower. This is a difficult area, as paying higher salaries to extension staff has budgetary implications throughout Government service. I believe, however, that it is possible to provide incentives to staff without unbalancing pay scales. Firstly by giving extension the respect it deserves, by making the field worker proud of his role in up-grading society, and secondly, by providing conditions which enable extension workers to perform effectively. Appropriate accommodation, a motor cycle and a travel allowance, and pride in the work program are often sufficient incentive to motivate good field workers. A similar incentive approach can remove much frustration from the shoulders of extension managers and so reduce the quality drain out of public services.

17. Manpower Development at Client Level. I must now divert somewhat to a critical area of high priority which deals less with extension per se and more with the farmer. There is clearly a trade-off between the education levels of farmers and the intensity and approach of extension. As farmers develop from a level of illiteracy through literate and ultimately high education levels, so the barriers between farmers and extension, and between farmers and research break down. Educating farmers shifts the center of gravity of knowledge acquisition from the supply side to the demand side. Furthermore, an increase in farmer education opens new opportunities for communication, through newspapers, pamphlets and eventually computer software. As farmers take the initiative in gathering and evaluating information, so extension manpower levels can

be reduced; the extension worker then becomes a consultant advisor rather than a surrogate for the written word.

18. At the beginning, I made the point that extension cannot be divorced from other components of development. Education levels and extension procedures illustrate this perfectly. The two are highly correlated; thus up-grading farmer education levels must have high priority in the development process.

19. Reducing Costs while Retaining Effectiveness. Reducing the costs of extension is a priority item for most countries. Cost cutting is a laudable objective as long as it is not achieved at the expense of effectiveness. This is a real danger. For example, where mass media techniques have been introduced as a cheap replacement for face-to-face extension the results have been unsatisfactory. Mass media programs produce awareness whereas face-to-face extension up-grades skills; the two can be synergistic but are rarely alternatives.

20. Government extension costs can be cut by sharing some of the responsibilities of extension with the private sector or with NGOs. Privatization of extension is usually only feasible with discrete commodity programs but, as experience in America and Europe shows, with development, farmers are increasingly prepared to pay for expert advice.

21. Working with groups rather than with individuals is a means of increasing extension coverage while keeping costs down. This approach is fine as long as extension adheres to the fundamentals of regular visits to groups at the field level. The group program in Malawi, for example, has great potential but is less effective than anticipated because groups congregate at special block gardens rather than on farmers' fields. The lessons apparent in real farming situations are then less obvious.

22. Developments in communication technology hold promise for cutting extension costs and increasing effectiveness. The use of video systems is particularly appropriate technology for information feedback for instance, and has been used to great effect in India. The use of computer expert systems at extension centers, to supplement the work of subject matter specialists, is another possibility for increasing extension efficiency; software for this is currently being tested in Brazil. Obviously computer technology will revolutionize education, training and extension systems in a time frame dependent on country circumstances. The trick will be to ensure that the system remains flexible to respond to changing circumstances, that software is demand driven, and that cost efficiency does not outweigh extension effectiveness.

23. Whatever approach is tried to juxtaposing mass media with face to face communication, to privatization or to increasing extension contacts, cutting extension costs without reducing effectiveness must be a priority item in future extension testing programs.

24. Summary and Conclusions. At the outset I set extension, in time and place, as a interacting constituent of the development process. Extension systems, extension policies and extension priorities are dependent upon the stage of development, and flexibility and adaptability must be keywords in that process. Several countries are now in the transition period from grain self sufficiency, diversifying their agriculture into high value food and export-oriented crops, and further into agro-industrialization. Similarly, we are seeing major changes in the rural/urban shift which impose strains on the social structure, and changes in international commodity and input prices which equally strain the economic environment. These challenges are not going to get less, they will inevitably increase. And extension must be fashioned, along with research, education and training, to help countries cope with these changes.

25. The World Bank sees extension as a vital component of development. In the past twenty years loans of almost US$2 billion have been made to help strengthen extension in the developing world and I see no evidence of the pace of this investment slackening. I anticipate that similar or greater investment will be made in research, training and education. However, the foremost priority will be to ensure that national policies allow these components to operate effectively.

26. In extension itself, highest priority must go to establishing appropriate systems based on sound management principles. Bank policy includes fostering sustained institution development and the principles embodied in a structured extension approach such as T and V are standing up to the test of time over widely varying geographical and socio-economic conditions.

27. I have stressed the important role of extension in social development and the priority we attach to making Governments aware of the potential force at their disposal. It is rarely difficult to persuade Governments to commit funds for national defence; they must be similarly persuaded to commit funds for defence of agricultural and social gains.

28. Education and manpower development are cornerstones not only of extension but of development itself. Education of farmers will bring new opportunities and new challenges. Manpower development will allow extension services to meet those challenges. Increasing human capital is a long process but one which must receive consistent high priority.

29. Finally, on the ever-present problem of how to bring down costs, I caution that this objective must not be achieved at the expense of effectiveness. Moves to privatize parts of extension operations are welcomed as long as the resulting system is not fragmented and the needs of farmers are fully serviced. Evidence from the western world suggests that privatization of extension may be inevitable but the pace of privatization

should be dictated by commercial circumstances and not by ill-considered legislation. Similarly, advances in communication technology are offering opportunities to reduce costs but again I caution against moving too fast. Opportunities for advances in extension and education methods are opening up rapidly but we must realise that we are attempting to influence societies which are highly risk-averse and sensitive to their traditional ways. Forcing the pace rather than facilitating growth is likely therefore to be counter productive.